Politics as Deviance:
Media Coverage of Third-Party Congressional Candidates

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I would also like to thank my husband Tom Baxter for his love and support.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Henry, with love.

Abstract

Third-party political candidates in the United States are often overlooked by scholars of political science and mass communication. This thesis contributes to the existing literature on third-party electoral politics by examining media coverage of third-party congressional candidates who ran in 2008. The coverage is examined using the mass-communication-based concept of the protest paradigm, which argues that media organizations negatively frame non-editorial news coverage of groups that challenge the status quo. The analysis finds that the protest paradigm element of marginalization is unmistakably present in coverage of third-party congressional candidates: of twenty-three candidates who reached the five-percent threshold, only ten received any coverage at all. The remaining protest paradigm elements of delegitimization and demonization where not found to be present in notable amounts, though the fact that the coverage analyzed mentions third-party candidates at all might indicate a somewhat favorable attitude toward third-party challengers. The hypothesis that the protest paradigm applies to third-party congressional candidates is only partly supported.

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Introduction: An Interdisciplinary Examination of Third Parties

Third-party political candidates in the United States are often overlooked by scholars of political science. Students studying congressional politics see little evidence of third-party candidates in their textbooks. Jacobson's (2009) book on congressional elections does not mention third parties at all; nor does Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen's (2009) overview of Congress. Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee's (2010) *Congress and Its Members* mentions third parties in a single paragraph of a five-hundred-page book. Third parties do not fare much better in mass communication research. What literature there is focuses on presidential (Pirch, 2006; Zaller & Hunt, 1994; Zaller & Hunt, 1995) or gubernatorial (Kirch, 2008) candidates rather than on congressional candidates. Because congressional elections are an important connection between local and federal politics and therefore allow for a more detailed look at issues of representation, this thesis examines how third-party congressional candidates were covered by local newspaper organizations during the 2008 elections.

A simple explanation for the lack of scholarly interest in third-party candidates is that they are rarely successful in gaining office at any level of government. However, third-party candidates can affect a major-party candidate's ability to achieve an electoral majority: four of the eight third-party candidates analyzed in this study did just that. For example, Dean Barkley, a third-party Minnesota candidate for United States Senate, received over 15% of the vote in an election in which the major-party candidates (Republican incumbent Norm Coleman and Democratic challenger Al Franken) remained

tied until the Minnesota State Supreme Court ruled in Franken's favor eight months after the election (Bacon, 2009). Third-party candidates can also affect major-party platforms. Jason Wallace, who ran as a Green Party candidate in Illinois' 11th district, advocated for environmental policy reform. During the election, the issue was taken up by his Democratic challenger (with the media giving credit to Wallace), who went on to win the election.

Given that third-party candidates can affect an election, whether by preventing a majority or raising under-addressed issues in the campaign, it is worth examining whether these candidates receive different media coverage than their major-party opponents. To examine these possible differences, this project examines whether a specific type of coverage similar to that of protest groups characterizes media portrayals of third-party candidates.

The contributions made by this project to the existing literature on congressional campaigns are twofold. First, third-party candidates, particularly in congressional elections, are an understudied phenomenon in both political science and mass communication. Second, this project takes an interdisciplinary approach that draws upon political science and mass communication literature to examine how local newspaper organizations cover third-party congressional candidates.

Chapter 1: The Political Science Perspective

Political science theories regarding political parties view them as three-dimensional entities: the party as governing organization, the party itself (outside of formal government), and the party in the electorate (Gillespie, 1993). Much of the political science analysis that followed Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 candidacies focuses on the party as governing organization; that is, it examines the question of how third parties function in a two-party system (Burnham, 1970; Green & Binning, 1997; Lawson, 1997; Lowi, 1998; Mazmanian, 1974; Rapoport & Stone, 2005). Other works examine third parties themselves, usually from a historical perspective (Collet, 1997; Dwyer & Kolodny, 1997; Gillespie, 1993; Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus 1984; Winger, 1997). The focus here is the party in the electorate – specifically, how media organizations help or hinder the ability of third-party candidates to attract the attention of voters.

Defining "Third Parties"

Following the lead of Rapoport and Stone (2005), the term *third-party candidate* and *minor-party candidate* are used interchangeably to refer to any candidate who runs as the nominee of a party other than the Democratic or Republican parties. Gillespie (1993) defines third parties as an organized group, self-designated as a party, that advocates for the interests of its members – whether alongside or in contradiction to existing political and party systems – and is unable to gain or sustain the preference of voters.

Gillespie (1993) outlines V.O. Key's (1955) two types of regional or national third parties. The first is the continuing doctrinal party, which is sustained for decades based

primarily on its members' commitment to the party creed rather than the hope of electoral success: these party members "find their gratification in being right" (Gillespie, 1993, p. 10).

The second type of party identified by Key is the short-lived party, which is often a protest or splinter group. Though their existence is brief, short-lived parties have a strong influence on public policy because their issues are acknowledged and taken up by major-party candidates. As Rapoport and Stone observe, "Third parties are like bees: once they have stung, they die" (2005, p. 5). Gillespie (1993) notes that the stronger a third-party's challenge to core major-party policies, the more likely it is that the third party will have a brief lifespan. Short-lived third parties are a signal to major parties that there are votes to be gained by absorbing a third-parties' policy positions; often this policy adjustment can be made easily by a major party (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). The broader the third-party constituency, the more likely it is to be raided by major parties looking for votes. Subsequent elections consist, in part, of major-party attempts to appeal to third-party constituencies (Rapoport & Stone, 2005). Further endangering the longevity of this type of party is the fact that short-lived parties often reach the peak of their popular appeal in the party's very beginnings, when the organization is "inexperienced, underdeveloped, and poorly financed," making it easier for the major parties to co-opt their followers (Gillespie, 1993, p. 16). Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus write of this process that "Although adopting their issue clearly steals the thunder from third parties, this is how minor parties have their impact on public policy. Third parties usually lose the

battle, but, through co-optation, often win the war" (1984, p. 44).

Gillespie adds a third type to Key's classification of third parties: the non-national significant other. Minnesota's DFL party is an example of this type of party. Near the end of World War I, the Farmer-Labor party was formed in Minnesota and quickly replaced the Democrats as the main opposition to Minnesota Republicans. In 1944, the Farmer-Labor party merged with the Democrats to form what still exists in Minnesota as the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party – a party that "never extended beyond the boundaries into which it was born" and thus remains a third party outside of Minnesota (Gillespie, 1993, p. 11-12).

Having established what a third-party is, the question of what makes a third party successful must be addressed. Because third-party candidates are so rarely elected, defining "success" in terms of electoral gains leaves out much of the accomplishments of these parties. Some scholars argue that issue uptake by the major parties is a measure of success. Lowi argues that a third party should be considered successful when it "jolts entrenched political journalism and academic political science toward reconsideration…raising fresh new curiosities about what really works in a democratic political system" (1998, p. 14-15). Rapoport and Stone (2005) take a more practical (and measureable) approach based on Walter Dean Burnham's (1970) definition of a successful third party as one that attracts at least five percent of the vote. To establish a clear, unambiguous measure of success for this study, Burnham's "five percent" definition of success is employed: only third-party candidates who received more than

five percent of the vote are included in the analysis that follows.

What Third Parties Do

Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1984) found that voters expect three things from major parties: attractive electoral choices, issue responsiveness, and competent management. Failure by the major-parties in any of these "basic needs" causes voters to look toward third parties as a viable option (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). Green and Binning (1997) define specific ways in which major parties can fail, and the types of third party movements that result:

> First, they can fail to offer plausible candidates, thus provoking campaigns by prominent personalities "independent" of their ranks. Such "personalistic" parties have been the most successful in the polls and hence are the best known. Second, the major parties can fail to address a critical issue, thus sparking protests that spill over into elections. These "protest" parties have been the most common kind of minor party in the United States. Finally, the major parties can fail to articulate a coherent ideology, thus encouraging the expressions of political principles. Such "principled" parties have been the longest-lived type of minor party (p. 88).

Third parties, then, allow voters to express their rejection of the major parties. Their supporters are usually formed as a coalition, not in support of but in opposition to a particular candidate or issue (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazaurus, 1984). Gillespie (1993) outlines two ways in which third parties stabilize and even reinforce the two-party system. First, third parties allow disaffected voters to make their discontent heard. Second, third-party activity can lead to a reassessment of major-party platforms by major-party leaders.

To reiterate, third parties serve two important roles in the American political process.

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They give citizens who would otherwise feel alienated from politics a role in the political process, and they create awareness and support for ideas that are otherwise ignored by the major parties (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). Perhaps most important, third parties "instigate change by stimulating a response from the major parties" (Rapoport & Stone, 2005, p. 5). Because they are not constrained by the need to seek the broadest possible constituency, third parties are able to take on more controversial issues, to which the major parties are then compelled to respond (Mazmanian, 1974). In this sense, third parties become "policy innovators" and a voice of change in a major party system, the agenda of which may seem irrelevant to many voters (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 223). Response from the major parties can be immediate, but lasting change comes slowly. Some ideas initially advocated only by third parties have eventually been taken up by the major parties, and, in combination with factors outside the third-party's control, have become public policy – for example, emancipation, progressive taxation, women's suffrage, and election reform (Mazmanian, 1974).

Mazmanian (1974) outlines a pattern of issue uptake in American politics. Initially, third parties advance minority views that then reach broader public acceptance. This public support leads to adoption of the issue by the major parties, which create public policy to address the issue. Ideas that the major parties fail to take up "either come to rest with fringe parties or fade back into the general reservoir of public opinions" (Mazmanian, 1974, p. 87).

By raising awareness of unaddressed political issues and giving voters a chance to be

heard, third parties serve an important function in the American electoral process. Gillespie (1993) defines the two utilities of third parties as social and individual. The social utility of third parties consists of their contribution to the marketplace of ideas (as discussed in the previous paragraph). Their individual utility is their appeal to voters who have what Gillespie cynically calls "Don Quixote syndrome." While most people prefer to support a candidate with a good chance of winning the election, voters with Don Quixote syndrome "feel attraction to lost causes" and see "significance in a vision that stands no chance of fulfillment" (Gillespie, 1993, p. 21). Whatever their motivation, there are voters for whom third parties present an attractive and compelling alternative. From the point of view of one political science scholar, "Those of us who worry about low voter turnout, and the millions of U.S. citizens who stay at home because they feel unrepresented, should be interested in healthy minor parties" (Winger, 1997, p. 160). However, as other scholars note, the reaction to third parties by politicians, academics, and the media has been anything but welcoming.

Barriers to Third-Party Success

The first barrier faced by third parties is that they are seldom taken seriously. Lowi observes that "any suggestion of the possibility of a genuine third party receives the cold shoulder from the press and bored ridicule from academics" (1998, p. 3). Dwyer and Kolodny (1997) identify three specific barriers to third-party success: voters' cultural biases against third parties; legal hurdles such as ballot access and election laws; and institutional barriers like campaign finance regulations and media exposure. What

follows is a brief examination of each of the three types of barriers.

Cultural Bias. The concept of cultural bias against third parties is based on the idea that voters' political socialization leads them to view elections as contests between Democrats and Republicans (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). This political socialization process also leads voters to believe that it is a deviation from the norm to vote for a third party (Gillespie, 1993). This belief extends to the third parties themselves, which are seen as disruptive to the two-party system. Such a viewpoint forces third parties to do something that is not expected of the major parties: they first have to establish their legitimacy. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus point out that the assumption of third-party illegitimacy reinforces the two-party system: "minor parties do poorly because they lack legitimacy, their poor showing further legitimates the two-party norm, causing third parties to do poorly, and so on" (1984, p. 40).

Because third-party votes are viewed as deviant within the existing political system, a third-party vote is not a selection but rather a rejection, an "extraordinary act" of explicit refusal to accept the two-party system (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 15). Though Americans enjoy and expect a wealth of choices in other aspects of their lives, when it comes to voting, voters do not view minor parties as realistic alternatives (Dwyer & Kolodny, 1997).

Voters are more likely to overcome their cultural bias against third parties "when certain motivations to vote for a minor party candidate are high, and the constraints against doing so are low" (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 125). This is not a

simple process. Citizens who choose to vote for a third-party candidate are faced with disapproval from their acquaintances, steep costs in terms of gathering information about lesser-known candidates, and the near-certain knowledge that their candidate will lose (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). So why vote for a third-party candidate at all? Voters are drawn to third parties when they feel that the major parties are no longer functional, when an appealing third-party candidate enters a race, or when they have developed a loyalty to a third party (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). Their end goal is the same: to advance policy goals. Only the means have changed. In fact, knowing that their chosen candidate is likely to lose may be the appeal for some voters, because they are not necessarily voting *for* a particular candidate but *against* both major-party candidates.

Fortunately for third parties – because many third-party candidates lack political experience – electability may not be the primary criterion used by the third-party voter, There are occasional third-party candidates who have previously held public office, which gives them several advantages including name recognition and an existing, loyal base of support. But for the most part, third-party candidates are inexperienced and are viewed by voters as being less qualified for office than their major-party challengers (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). As a result, third-party candidates languish in "political obscurity," unable to gain the support or publicity that would lead to electoral success (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 38). The prediction that a third-party candidate is unlikely to win becomes self-fulfilling as money, support, media coverage,

and votes are all harder to come by (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). The 1980 National Election Study found that over half the respondents who said they considered voting for third-party candidate John Anderson, but did not, feared that voting for him would have helped elect the candidate they least wanted to win. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1984) point out that major parties are more than happy to stoke those fears in voters and to argue that third-party votes are wasted on candidates who stand far outside the mainstream.

The involvement of the major parties in maintaining and amplifying voters' cultural biases against third parties is an act of self-preservation. Existing party coalitions are weakened when new voters are added and existing voters are mobilized to instigate change. Lowi writes that "established parties have an investment in existing social cleavages" (1998, p. 7). This is perfectly in line with the media's role in maintaining the societal status quo in order to preserve their place within it – a concept that will be explored further in the next chapter.

Legal Barriers. The second type of barrier identified by Dwyer and Kolodny (1997) is the legal barrier. Lawson writes that poor electoral results on the part of third parties cannot be blamed solely on the biases of voters, because "the scales have been tipped against [third parties] before they ever formed and certainly before they can wage an effective campaign" (1997, p. 61). The two-party system that voters, journalists, and scholars view as natural has been carefully created and maintained by laws governing primaries, nominations, campaign finance, and elections that offer significant advantages

to the two major parties (Lowi, 1998). Ballot access is a major hurdle for third-party candidates, especially at the national level, requiring legal expertise in election law to navigate the system. These "fences" keep third parties on the periphery of the political process, and "if you climb to the top you will find them lined with barbed wire and broken glass" (Gillespie, 1993, p. 37).

Institutional Barriers. The final barrier to third-party electoral success as defined by Dwyer and Kolodny (1997) is institutional, and includes media exposure. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus offer a concise summary of the barriers to third-party success from an academic perspective, noting that most theories of voting behavior "focus on how voters choose *between* the Democrat and the Republican, or *between* the incumbent and the challenger" [emphasis in original] (1984, p. 7). This false dichotomy carries over into media coverage of elections, to which we now turn.

Third Parties and the Media

Gillespie (1993) observes that there is consensus among political scientists that mass media have replaced the major parties as the link between candidates and voters. In spite of this important responsibility, the media continue their failure to provide information about third-party candidates, and when they do, the information provided "helps convince [voters] that their cause is hopeless" (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 37). The end result is that voters who choose third-party candidates are likely do so in spite of, rather than because of, the media's campaign coverage. By focusing their resources only on candidates who have a good chance of winning and by presenting campaigns as a "horse

race" rather than in terms of issues and agendas, the media affect voters' perceptions of candidates and their chances (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). Political scientists seem to recognize that the media have a great deal of control over who is heard and what is said, but they have little to offer in the way of suggested reforms. Dwyer and Kolodny (1997) advocate communications vouchers for all candidates that could be used to "buy" airtime, mandatory inclusion of all candidates in media-run debates, and a federal-level requirement that broadcasters cover all candidates on the ballot. Whether realistic or not, some political science scholars acknowledge that changes in the way elections are covered would benefit American democracy by bringing a wider range of issues into the public arena. Lawson (1997) suggests that opening political coverage to all candidates is more likely to result in a shared national agenda. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1984) argue that increasing opportunities for third-party activity – in the media as well as in the electoral process – would benefit representation of minority views. The less control the major parties have over government, the authors argue, the more likely they are to become motivated and respond to the concerns of political minorities (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984).

Benefits of the Multi-Party System

American third parties have been around since the 1820s, making them a traditional part of our democratic process (Gillespie, 1993). Though third-party candidates are less successful than major party candidates in terms of gaining electoral office, they have brought a number of important issues, like slavery and women's suffrage, into the

national debate. Some scholars argue that a multi-party system would benefit voters by forcing major parties to be more specific about their platforms. Currently, to gain the required 51 percent majority, parties and candidates have to appeal to roughly 80 percent of the voters, meaning that their platform is deliberately vague and non-provocative. Parties aiming for pluralities rather than majorities could focus more on specific issues rather than generalities (Lowi, 1998).

While third-parties can add important benefits to the party system, their electoral aims must be realistic: rather than pursuing a radical government takeover, third parties are most likely to succeed when they are built from the ground up, gathering voters who feel alienated from the two major parties (Lowi, 1998). These alienated voters, when presented with a candidate or issue they support, do more than just vote – they circulate petitions, advocate for the candidate or issue, and contribute to campaigns. In other words, third parties are "an antidote to the mass politics that virtually everybody complains about nowadays" (Lowi, 1998, p. 10).

A democracy is protected by the ability of its citizens to make a rational choice among all available options (Mazmanian, 1974). Rather than being a deviation from the political norm, third parties represent the voices of Americans who are ignored by the major parties. By giving an option to voters who feel left out of the political process, third parties preserve democracy (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984). Their power rests in their ability to "affect the content and range of political discourse, and ultimately public policy" by advocating non-mainstream issues and encouraging major parties to

compromise (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 8). Third parties are an important

part of the electoral process, arising from the failures of the major parties and forcing

them to respond to voters they might otherwise ignore (Rapoport & Stone, 2005).

Gillespie (1993) argues that third parties are part of "the politics of redemption" in which

the goal is to build a better world. Their adherents "truly are heeding the sounds of a

different drummer" (Gillespie, 1993, p. 5).

Chapter 2: The Mass Communication Perspective

Whether success is defined in terms of electoral results or increased awareness of an issue, for a third-party candidate at any level any success is dependent, in part, on the media's willingness to cover the candidate and his or her policy positions. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996) write that votes for third-party candidates are "less likely to occur when … information about a third party cause is hard to come by" (p. 150).

Pirch (2006) explains that modern campaigns "are viewed almost exclusively through the lens of the media – the media frame the debates, explain the issues, and give credibility to candidates" (p. 5). Gitlin (1977) notes that there is a process by which certain issues get onto the media agenda: "Every media message is a choice, the product of a long line of political, economic, administrative, 'professional' decisions" (p. 792). Kirch (2008) writes that reporters can affect the outcome of an election by giving voters the impression that third-party candidates have little or no public support, which can sway voters into not voting at all or convince them to vote for a major-party candidate instead.

In the United States, the media have shown little interest in third-party candidates and platforms; in fact, Kirch (2008) finds that the media have a financial interest in narrowing the field and focusing their resources on only two candidates for any given race. Further investigation is needed to demonstrate specific ways in which third-party candidates are treated by media organizations. McLeod and Hertog (1999) offer a useful framework for examining and classifying coverage of third-party candidates.

The Protest Paradigm

McLeod and Hertog (1999) outline a "protest paradigm" model of media coverage of protest groups that consists of three main elements: marginalization, delegitimization, and demonization. The authors argue that because media organizations have an interest in the societal status quo and their position within it, they have an incentive to maintain social control by stifling protest groups. According to McLeod and Hertog, the media's methods of social control are easiest to examine when they are applied to groups that "go against the grain" (1999, p. 309). Protest groups do this by bringing new issues to the political agenda, offering criticisms of society and government, and participating in the political marketplace of ideas (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). By doing so, protest groups threaten the status quo and are therefore subject to protest paradigm coverage.

The central argument of this thesis is that third-party candidates, by running as a protest against the existing political system, are subject to media coverage similar to that of protest groups. What follows is a brief outline of protest paradigm coverage and how it can be adapted to third-party political candidates.

Marginalization. The first element of protest paradigm coverage, marginalization, occurs when media reports emphasize the ways in which the protest group differs from the mainstream public rather than highlighting common ground (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Marginalizing coverage downplays the size of the protest, undercounting the number of people who show up in support of a particular issue. The media also marginalize protest groups by narrowly defining "success": protest paradigm coverage

portrays protests as an attempt to change government or corporate policy, and when no immediate change is made, the protest is labeled a failure by the media (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). How might we make the concept of marginalization relevant to political parties? Pirch (2006) cites this type of coverage in the relatively successful campaigns of third-party presidential candidates George Wallace (1968), John Anderson (1980) and Ross Perot (1992). Each candidate ran on a platform that was contrary to both major-party platforms (anti-Civil Rights, liberal Republicanism, and anti-Free Trade, respectively), and the issue on which each third-party candidate ran was "rendered moot by the candidate's failure" (Pirch, 2006, p. 4). While useful, this measure of marginalization is difficult to quantify and requires following media coverage long after the election has ended; because this thesis focuses on election coverage, the analysis that follows will include a more efficient and informative measure of marginalization identified by McLeod and Hertog (1999): non-coverage (relative to that of major-party candidates).

Delegitimization. The second element of the protest paradigm, delegitimization, questions a group's actions by using quotation marks (e.g., "peace march"), challenges a group's self-identification (e.g., "These protesters call themselves anarchists"), and paraphrases rather than directly quoting representatives of the group, thus taking away their authority (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Paraphrasing has also been examined in studies of female candidates. Aday and Devitt (2001) found that during the 2000 presidential primaries, Elizabeth Dole was paraphrased more often than her male

challengers. The authors speculate that by not quoting Dole directly, reporters were demonstrating that they took her campaign less seriously and were therefore offering less substantive coverage. Though Aday and Devitt do not refer to it as such, reporters were effectively delegitimizing Dole's campaign. The authors also found that Dole also received less coverage of her campaign issues and more coverage of her personality traits than did her male challengers, further delegitimizing her as a candidate (Aday & Devitt, 2001).

Demonization. The third and final element of protest paradigm coverage is demonization. Demonization portrays protest groups as an enemy or threat; such media coverage overestimates the risk posed by a particular group. Gitlin (1977) adds that applying terms such as "radical" and "extremist" implies violence. McLeod and Hertog cite research showing two consequences of protest paradigm coverage on public perception: it influences what the public thinks about protest groups and about the usefulness of protest "as a form of democratic expression" (1999, p. 322). Demonization as an assessment of threat or risk carries over into political coverage when third-party candidates are referred to as "spoilers" who will take votes away from a major-party candidate, thus strengthening the chances of the major-party opponent. This element occurred with some regularity in the coverage examined for this study and will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

In summary, the protest paradigm is designed to identify and exclude groups that operate outside the status quo. The question addressed by this analysis is whether third-

party political candidates, who often run against the existing political system, are subject to the same kind of coverage.

Third-Party Candidates as Protest Candidates: Presidential Races

Although the analysis conducted for this thesis focuses on congressional candidates, much of the existing literature on media coverage of third-party candidates focuses on presidential elections. Thus it is to these elections that we will turn for our examples. Reviewing the election coverage of two prominent third-party presidential candidates can illuminate how protest paradigm coverage might look when applied to political candidates.

Ross Perot of the Reform Party ran in 1992 as an outside-the-beltway populist candidate and won 19 percent of the vote; when he ran again in 1996, he received 8 percent of the vote. Ralph Nader of the Green Party ran in 2000 as a pro-consumer, anti-corporate candidate and won 2.73 percent of the vote. In comparing Perot and Nader, Allen and Brox (2005) find some common threads: each candidacy benefited from widespread discontent with the major parties and/or their candidates, and each candidacy motivated voters to cast their vote for a non-major party candidate. Ross Perot received a larger percentage of the vote than any third-party candidate in 80 years (Luntz, 1993). Perot was a political outsider whose primary agenda was fixing the economy. Perot's supporters also considered themselves political outsiders, refusing to classify themselves – or Perot – as either liberal or conservative (Luntz, 1993). In focus groups, Perot supporters repeatedly expressed their distrust and anger toward current elected officials;

while they felt that politicians were only in it for themselves, they believed that they could trust Perot to look after their interests, which they felt was a radical political change. Perot and his supporters made the case that they were protesting and revolutionizing the current political system by trying to put what they considered a truth-teller at the head of government (Luntz, 1993).

Allen and Brox (2005) focus on Ralph Nader's 2000 presidential campaign, which they describe as "a fairly straightforward left-wing protest campaign" (p. 625). Although Nader won only a small percent of the overall vote, he had a significant effect on the race, drawing away potential Democratic voters and forcing Al Gore and George Bush to focus on states like Wisconsin and Oregon (Allen & Brox, 2005). In spite of his effect on the race, Pirch (2006) observes that Nader received only 8 percent of the total presidential campaign coverage in 2000. In contrast, Perot's 1992 campaign received 23 percent of the total campaign coverage in the media.

Making the Connection: Protest Paradigm Coverage of Nader and Perot

Focusing specifically on McLeod and Hertog's concepts of marginalization, delegitimization, and demonization, we can examine media coverage of Ralph Nader's 2008 presidential campaign to see these concepts at work. For an efficient overview of Nader's coverage in newspapers and to test the search method used for the analysis that follows, this section employs LexisNexis searches to find election coverage.

Marginalization. This section uses the amount of coverage received by three of the 2008 presidential candidates to measure marginalization. The search, conducted on

LexisNexis, restricted results to U.S. newspapers and wires for the date range January 1,

2008 to November 4, 2008 (election day). The first search term, *John McCain campaign*,

returned 1,003 newspaper results. The second search term, *Barack Obama campaign*,

returned 1,265 newspaper results. In contrast, searching *Ralph Nader campaign* returned

only 28 newspaper results. In fairness, other search terms may have retrieved a different

number of articles for each candidate; however, framing the search by connecting the

candidate and the word "campaign" offers an indication that Ralph Nader was not

referred to as a candidate as often as McCain and Obama. This kind of marginalization –

a comparatively low level of coverage – is also found in congressional elections to a large

degree, as the full analysis of 2008 congressional candidates will show.

    Delegitimization. The following report on reactions to Nader's 2008 announcement

that he would run for president a fourth time is typical of the marginalization Nader

received from the media:

> When Ralph Nader announced that he was running for president -
> - again -- last Sunday, commentators and political strategists were
> quick to express scorn. The announcement itself, ABC's George
> Stephanopoulos scoffed that morning, "was the high moment of
> his campaign." In the days that followed, the Los Angeles Times,
> the New York Times and The Post all described Nader's decision
> to run as an ego trip that represented his political "nadir." Political
> operatives assured the public that Nader was not to be taken
> seriously. "People are simply not going to make that mistake
> again," said Chris Lehane, former press secretary to Al Gore.
> Even Charlie Black, a senior adviser to John McCain's campaign,
> predicted that Nader would get "less than 1 percent of the vote"
> (Schoen, 2008).

By classifying Nader's 2008 run as an "ego trip," major media outlets immediately

delegitimized Nader by describing him as a candidate who had no chance of winning or

even affecting the election. His 2008 candidacy was dismissed as irrelevant by the media as soon as it was announced. Thus it is unsurprising that Burkeman (2008) found polls showing that two-thirds of Americans did not know Nader was a candidate in the 2008 presidential election. A second indicator of delegitimization is found in the physical descriptions of Nader. A LexisNexis search (1998-2008) for "Nader rumpled" brings up more than fifty articles that refer to Nader's habit of wearing wrinkled suits. By focusing on Nader's appearance, the media de-legitimize him (just as they do when they focus on the physical appearance of female candidates).

Demonization. It is easy to make the case that Nader was demonized by the media, especially after the 2000 election. A LexisNexis search limited to 1998-2008 for "Nader 2000" reveals numerous headlines containing words like "spoiler," "cost," and "blame." Rather than framing his 2000 candidacy in terms of what issues he brought to the race, the media framed Nader's run strictly in terms of his effect on Gore's vote totals. This frame continued through the 2008 race; a LexisNexis search for "Nader 2008" reveals only six articles, five of which refer to Libertarian candidate Bob Barr as the Ralph Nader of the 2008 election (because of the fear that he would draw votes away from Republican candidate John McCain). Finally, a search for "Nader factor," a negative term for the effect a third-party candidate can have on the overall vote, brings up 104 articles published between 2000 and 2008.

Explaining Third-Party Media Coverage

But more often than being written about in negative terms, Nader, like many third-

party candidates, was simply ignored by the media. Kirch (2008) explains some of the

motivations behind the lack of media coverage when it comes to third-party candidates.

According to Zaller's (1999) rule of anticipated importance, writes Kirch, reporters

choose not to focus on third-party candidates because they assume that readers do not

have time or energy to learn about every candidate in a given race (2008). In other words,

reporters are weeding out candidates as a service to their readers. In addition, writes

Kirch, reporters want to maintain their credibility by focusing on popular and successful

candidates (2008). Kirch sums up Zaller's rule of anticipated importance by explaining

that reporters have a desire to maintain their status among their peers; as a result, they

will avoid focusing their efforts on a "weak" candidate who has little chance of winning

an election (2008).

Kirch (2008) also explains that reporters are motivated by an existing system of

journalistic logic by which they seek to exclude rather than include candidates in their

coverage. Financial limitations lead news organizations to streamline their coverage to

save resources. Having multiple candidates to cover is expensive and time-consuming; as

a result, newspapers are motivated to save money by selecting (and limiting) which

candidates will receive coverage (Kirch, 2008).

A Different Kind of Third-Party Media Coverage: The Case of Ross Perot

Are there exceptions to the rule of limited media coverage for third-party candidates?

Although the media can easily dismiss a candidate, they can also act to elevate one based

on a specific set of criteria. Zaller and Hunt (1994) study the ways in which political

institutions – political parties and the press – make decisions about which candidates receive media attention. They argue that elite journalists try to predict future opinion (also called latent opinion) when deciding whom to cover. In the case of Ross Perot's 1992 campaign, latent opinion was a deciding factor at three points during the campaign: in the spring of 1992, when it appeared that Perot had the potential to gain wide support; late spring 1992, when reporters thought that Perot's candidacy might affect the outcome of the race; and in the months just before the election, when it became clear that Perot could not win the election. When reporters speculated that Perot's chances were good, they increased his coverage; once they realized that he would not affect the outcome, they decreased the coverage, making "a third place finish more likely" (Zaller & Hunt, 1994, p. 359).

Zaller and Hunt argue that reporters use a specific set of measures when deciding which candidates will receive coverage: "demonstrated mass appeal, financial viability, organizational strength," and, perhaps most important, reporters' own judgment about how the nomination process will play out (1994, p. 377). In this sense, write Zaller and Hunt (1995), Perot's candidacy was not unusual – as a popular, wealthy, party-supported and viable candidate, he was simply one of three candidates in 1992 able to meet the requirements journalists had set for candidate coverage. Gold (1995) notes that Perot differed from other third-party presidential candidates in his willingness to spend $69 million of his own money to "guarantee his continued media exposure" (p. 770). Perot, then, was not an exception to the practice of minimizing third-party candidate coverage;

rather, he was deemed by the media early on to be a viable candidate and was covered as if he were a major-party candidate until it became clear that he did not have a chance of winning the election.

The campaigns of Ralph Nader and Ross Perot are examples of the extremes to which the media will go in their coverage of third-party candidates. More often, third-party candidates are simply ignored, dismissed by the media as non-viable candidates who "spend their campaigns languishing in obscurity" (Pirch, 2006, p. 3). Voters, too, are marginalized by this lack of coverage. It is only when a third-party candidate reaches a level of electoral success (Perot) or has a significant impact in a given race (Nader) that attention is paid to candidates and voters who choose to opt out of the major-party system. What kind of media coverage this attention brings is the focus of the following chapters. Because the number of third-party presidential candidates is small and because issues of representation are more prominent at the congressional level, the analysis will focus on congressional candidates. Congressional candidates offer two advantages for a protest paradigm analysis. First, their elections occur at either the district level or the state level and therefore draw more candidates from more parties (i.e., there is a larger population of candidates from whom to choose). Second, although they are elected locally, the work these candidates aim to undertake in Congress has a national impact. As a result, the implications of media coverage are widespread.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Although third-party candidates and their supporters do not take to the streets like the

protest groups analyzed by McLeod and Hertog (1999), third-party candidates often

frame their campaigns in terms of upending the status quo. Like the protest groups in

McLeod and Hertog's (1999) study, third-party candidates seek to bring new issues to the

political agenda, offer criticisms of society and government, and participate in the

political marketplace of ideas. Given that third-party candidates often run as a protest of

the current political system, it is worthwhile to examine whether these candidates receive

protest paradigm coverage. The primary research question generated by the literature is:

Does media coverage of third-party congressional candidates follow the protest

paradigm? An examination of media coverage of third-party congressional candidates

will help address this question. I hypothesize that third-party candidate coverage will

follow the protest paradigm, which will result in third-party candidates being

marginalized, delegitimized, and demonized in newspaper coverage of their campaigns.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This analysis examines newspaper coverage of 2008 congressional races to determine whether, as hypothesized, third-party candidate coverage will contain the protest paradigm elements of marginalization, delegitimization, and demonization. Election statistics for the study were gathered from the website of the House of Representatives Office of the Clerk.[1] The articles analyzed for the study were found using LexisNexis.

In 2008, a total of 253 third-party candidates were listed on the ballots for U.S. House and Senate elections. To narrow the focus of the study, only media coverage of third-party candidates who met the following criteria was considered:

- the third-party candidate received at least 5 percent of the vote;
- the race involved both a Republican and Democratic opponent;
- the candidate's district or region included at least one newspaper that archives full-text articles in LexisNexis

Twenty-three candidates met these criteria, but it quickly became apparent that marginalization was present in media coverage of the twenty-three qualifying candidates. Only ten of the twenty-three had received enough coverage to code; thirteen had no coverage at all or were not mentioned in substantive articles (some candidates' names did turn up in newspaper reports of Federal Election Commission filings or lists of ballot choices). Further restricting the sample was the presence of two "fake" third-party candidates. These two candidates were eliminated from the study because each candidate

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[1] http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/2008/2008Stat.html

(Saunders, FL 14 and Jackson, LA 6) was a major-party state legislator at the same time he was running for election to the U.S. House of Representatives as a third-party candidate. As a result, both would have received more coverage due to their public profile as state legislators, and, more important for the purpose of this study, neither candidate would have presented himself as a true third-party candidate protesting the existing political system. Table 2 lists the twenty-three candidates who qualified for the study. Table 3 lists the subset of eight candidates sampled for analysis. Each table includes the state and district of the race, the names of the candidates (beginning with the third-party candidate, followed by the winning candidate and the major-party challenger), the number and percentage of votes received by each candidate, the number and percentage of coverage found for each candidate, and the number of articles analyzed for the study. Because incumbency may be a factor in the amount of coverage received, incumbents' names are followed by an "i." Seats without an incumbent in the race are marked with a "v" (next to the word "total" in each race) to indicate that the seat was vacant at the time of the election.

A note on party identification: Tables 2 and 3 spell out party names when necessary. Otherwise "grn" indicates the Green Party, "lib" indicates Libertarian, "npa" stands for *no party affiliation*, and "con" stands for the Constitution Party. Candidates marked with "ip" ran (in Minnesota) as Independence Party candidates. Candidates marked "i" ran as independent candidates (essentially the same as no party affiliation). The significance of the different types of parties is of great interest but is outside the scope of the present

analysis.

Each paragraph of a news story was analyzed for specific types of content (Table 1 contains the coding guidelines used in the study). The total number of articles coded for the study was 226; the total number of paragraphs analyzed was 3,659.

Newspaper articles were collected by conducting a LexisNexis news database search for each candidate's name. The date range was limited to January 1, 2008 through election day, November 4, 2008. The search was further limited to local newspapers. Editorials and press releases were excluded from the search. Upon searching each candidate's name within the specified date range, a notation was made of the number of newspaper articles listed from papers within the candidate's region. For example, Minnesota candidate searches were limited to the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. For the major-party candidates, the analysis did not go further than the notation of the number of articles found.

The local articles found by searching for the third-party candidate's name were printed and coded. Articles with no news content (e.g., FEC filing lists or ballot lists) or articles that were clearly not about the third-party candidate or the election were excluded. In addition, articles in which the third-party candidate's name was mentioned only once, with no additional information, in the last paragraph of a 20-plus-paragraph article were excluded (these excluded articles, though not coded, do contribute to the first marginalization measure). As a result of this technique for weeding out irrelevant articles, the list of candidates in Tables 2 and 3 may list 30 articles found (as in the case of

Anderson, from Minnesota's sixth district) but only 17 articles analyzed.

It is important to note that *only* articles found by searching for the third-party candidate were coded. Therefore, each article coded for this study will contain at least one mention of the third-party candidate.

The independent variable for this study is third-party candidate status. The dependent variables in this study measure aspects of media coverage as defined by the protest paradigm: proportion of coverage as compared to their major-party challenger(s) (to address marginalization); content of coverage (to address delegitimization); and tone of coverage (to address demonization). Details of the dependent variable measures can be found in the coding guidelines (Table 1). Because the sample size is so small (N = 8), it was determined that the analysis did not lend itself to statistical testing. Instead, to provide an exploratory overview of the analysis, simple counts and proportions were used to measure each element.

The following chart provides a summary of the coding guidelines (which can be found in Table 1). Examples of each element will be provided in the following chapter.

marginalization (amount of coverage)	delegitimization (content of coverage)	demonization (tone of coverage)
measure 1 – search-generated	*measure 1 – simple count.*	*measure 1 – simple count.*
comparison of the number of articles found by searching for Democrat, Republican, and third-party candidate	paragraphs containing references to the third-party candidate as vote of no confidence, non-contender, and/or vote against <u>both</u> Democrat and Republican	paragraphs containing references to the third-party candidate as spoiler, wasted vote, or dangerous/foolish
measure 2 – comparison of proportions.	*measure 2 – count, comparison.*	*measure 2 – simple count.*
paragraphs mentioning third-party candiate/total number of paragraphs in article paragraphs mentioning Democrat/total number of paragraphs in article paragraphs mentioning Republican/total number of paragraphs in article	number paragraphs containing direct quotes by third-party candidate, Democrat, and Republican compared to the number of paragraphs in which third-party candidate, Democrat, and Republican are paraphrased	every paragraph that mentions the third-party candidate is coded as either: neutral – factual, nonjudgmental information about third-party candidate positive – policy views, voter appeal, engaged opponents negative – non-viable, damaging to Democrat or Republican, dismissal, fringe or mixed – positive and negative in same paragraph

Marginalization: Amount of Coverage

The first and second marginalization measures come from McLeod and Hertog's

(1999) reference to non-coverage as marginalization and serve as a crude but effective

measure of the amount of coverage third-party candidates receive compared to their

major-party challengers. The first measure is a result of the LexisNexis search for each

candidate's name. The second measure is a paragraph-level measure of the number of

references to each candidate (remember that only articles mentioning third-party

candidates were analyzed, so each article will mention the third-party candidate at least

once).

Delegitimization: Content of Coverage

Both delegitimization measures were taken at the paragraph level. The first delegitimization measure is an attitude of dismissal toward the third-party candidate as someone who is neither a serious candidate nor a serious option for voters. The second delegitimization measure is a proportion of direct quotes versus paraphrasing for each candidate. The implication, which comes from McLeod and Hertog's (1999) analysis, is that directly quoting a candidate confers authority on the candidate in a way that paraphrasing does not.

Demonization: Tone of Coverage

The first demonization measure is designed to capture paragraph-level references to the third-party candidate as actually damaging to the race by taking votes away from one of the major-party candidates. This might be observed in the use of the word *spoiler* to describe the third-party candidate; it can also appear as a reference to the candidate as a wasted vote or to the Nader effect (a negative reference to Nader's influence on the 2000 presidential election). The second demonization measure is a paragraph-level count of how the third-party candidate is portrayed: the options are *neutral*, *positive*, *negative*, or *mixed*.

It is possible for a paragraph to be counted as both delegitimizing and demonizing, because dismissals of the candidate fit into both the first delegitimization measure and the second demonization measure.

Chapter 4: Results

The hypothesis that third-party candidates will receive media coverage that parallels McLeod and Hertog's (1999) protest paradigm is only partly supported by the analysis. This section includes the coding analysis results as well as specific examples from some of the articles. Results are displayed in Table 4 (descriptive statistics for each race showing the number of articles and paragraphs coded for each candidate) and Table 5 (coding results).

Marginalization

Initial analysis revealed that of the twenty-three candidates who qualified for this study using Burnham's (1970) five-percent rule, only ten received enough media coverage to generate articles for coding (two of the ten were eliminated, leaving eight for analysis), suggesting that a high level of marginalization of third-party congressional candidates does occur.

In support of this finding, Table 5 shows that coding of the second marginalization measure (the number of paragraphs in which each candidate was mentioned) revealed that third-party candidates were referred to, on average, in 4.87 paragraphs per article (SD 5.14). In contrast, their Democratic opponents were referred to an average of 6.20 paragraphs per article (SD 6.63) and their Republican opponents an average of 6.84 paragraphs per article (SD 5.63). This finding suggests that while major-party candidates

are mentioned relatively equally, third-party candidates are mentioned less often.[2] It is important to keep in mind that the only articles coded for this study were found by searching for articles listed under the third-party candidate's name, so every article coded in this study mentions one of the eight selected third-party candidates. Yet even in these articles, third-party candidates received less of the coverage than their major-party opponents.

A closer reading of the articles revealed a noteworthy measure of marginalization that was not included in this analysis: the first paragraph in which the third-party candidate is mentioned. For example, in the race for Ohio's second congressional district (which generated only two articles for analysis), third-party candidate Krikorian is not mentioned until the fifth paragraph of the first article; after several mentions of sparring between the two major-party candidates, the reporter writes, "Independent candidate David Krikorian, meanwhile, argued…" (Wehrman, 2008). This nuanced use of language would not have been captured by this project's coding, but it reveals the subtle ways in which third-party candidates are presented to newspaper readers. The article begins with a summary of the major-party candidates' differences; Krikorian is mentioned as an aside ("meanwhile"). The second article that mentions Krikorian does not refer to him until paragraph 31.

In the race for Minnesota's sixth congressional district, third-party candidate Anderson received marginalizing coverage, particularly from the Minneapolis *Star*

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[2] Breaking down the candidates by party and analyzing coverage separately revealed greater discrepancies in coverage, but this analysis was not included due to the unevenness of the distribution (one non-party candidate, three Green Party candidates, and five Independent/Independence Party candidates). An individual-level analysis of candidates did not produce informative differences in coverage and was not included in the study.

Tribune. Polls were framed as two-way races with Anderson trailing behind, and Anderson was largely ignored in the coverage until the final few paragraphs of each article, and then only with statements such as "also running in the race" (Doyle, 2008b) or "a third participant in the debate" (Doyle, 2008a).

Although the first mention of each third-party candidate was not included in the coding, it could be viewed as an indicator of marginalization. (The framing of Krikorian as an outside observer of the major-party candidate sparring and the references to Anderson as an "also running" candidate would have been captured in the initial analysis as a negative mention and thus recorded as an instance of demonization.)

Delegitimization

The first delegitimization measure involved a count of paragraph-level references to the third-party candidate as a vote of "no confidence" against both major-party candidates or as a protest vote. The mean proportion for this measure was a scant 0.29, suggesting that few paragraphs per article contained delegitimization references. The second measure of delegitimization revealed slight differences between direct quotes and paraphrasing of third-party candidates. Third-party candidates were directly quoted in an average of .98 paragraphs per article; they were paraphrased in an average of 1.08 paragraphs per article. In comparison, major-party candidates were closer to equal between average direct quotes and paraphrasing (Democrats 1.12 vs. 1.18; Republicans 1.22 vs. 1.19). Although it appears that third-party candidates were paraphrased more often than they were quoted, the difference is slight.

Demonization

The first demonization measure looked for paragraph-level references to the third-party candidate as a spoiler who risks taking away votes from one of the major-party candidates; the mean here was an unremarkable 0.17. Very few paragraphs per article referred to the third-party candidate in this manner.

Finally, the second measure of demonization looked at the tone of each paragraph that mentions the third-party candidate. Neutral references to the third-party candidate, which include factual information without commentary or judgmental language, occurred in an average of 2.74 paragraphs per article (SD 3.64). The average number of positive references (electoral achievement, policy views, engaged opponents, surprising poll numbers) was 1.50 paragraphs per article (SD 2.30). The average number of negative references (non-viable, damaging, fringe, dismissal by major-party candidates) was quite low: 0.50 paragraphs per article (SD .94). The average number of mixed references (paragraphs that made a combination of positive, negative, and/or neutral references) was 0.93 (SD 0.37).[3] For the purpose of this study, neutral portrayals represent fairly objective portrayals. The relatively high number of neutral portrayals, in addition to the fact that there were more positive than negative portrayals, suggests that demonization of third-party candidates did not occur in the articles sampled for this study.

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[3]Upon reviewing the second demonization measure it became obvious that the number of neutral, positive, negative, and mixed parargraphs adds up to more than the number of third-party candidate mentions. This discrepancy appears to be a coding issue but cannot be explained as of this writing but will be addressed in later iterations of this project.

An Unexpected Finding: Positive Coverage of Third-Party Candidates

Two of the races studied for this analysis contain coverage that is notable for its positive tone. Although these examples run contrary to the hypothesis, they are included as examples of normative coverage of electoral politics. The first race features an instance of co-optation by a major-party candidate; the second features a remarkable level of equal treatment among a disparate and amusing group of candidates. It may help to illustrate what protest paradigm coverage is *not* in order to better understand what it is.

Wallace vs. Halvorson vs. Ozinga: Illinois' Eleventh Congressional District

The Bloomington, Illinois *Pantagraph* coverage treated Green Party candidate Wallace, age 26 at the time, as a legitimate candidate, equating him with his challengers: "Ozinga faces Democrat Debbie Halvorson of Crete and Green party candidate Jason Wallace in a race that ranks in the top tier of congressional match-ups in the nation" (Erickson, 2008b). The coverage often referred to Wallace's background as a political science major and Iraq War veteran. He was given equal time on issues, quoted directly, and his low fundraising numbers were explained as a purposeful strategy (he was allegedly trying to show his independence from special interests). This kind of coverage happened only later in the race, however; early on, there were a number of "also in the race" mentions of Wallace, the same type featured in news stories about other third-party candidates.

The most interesting aspect of Wallace's coverage is that two of the articles explicitly mentioned issue uptake by Halvorson, the Democrat who would go on to win the race.

Issue uptake, as defined by Sulkin (2005), is the process by which candidates take on the issue positions of their competitors. In Sulkin's research, issue uptake is demonstrated once the winning candidate takes office; this study does not go beyond election day. But there was unquestionably an effect on Halvorson's campaign as the race progressed, with one article referring to the fact that she had "piggy-backed on Wallace's environmental push" (Erickson, 2008b). Another article said Halvorson was "taking a page from her Green Party opponent" in her prioritizing of alternative energy policies (Erickson, 2008a). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the more positive *Pantagraph* coverage of Wallace began after Halvorson adopted Wallace's issue agenda.

In spite of the positive local coverage of Wallace and his campaign, and the relatively large amount of coverage he received in comparison to his major-party challengers (more than major-party challenger Ozinga), Wallace received just over 7% of the vote. In a district that had gone from strong Republican to strong Democratic, a Green Party candidate failed to gain much traction. This appears to be an example of co-optation, though one would have to examine Halvorson's post-election legislative record to find out whether she was sincere in her adoption of Green Party environmental policies. Perhaps this co-optation is why Wallace did relatively poorly in the election: by giving voters an appealing major-party platform that included minor-party issues, Halvorson broadened her base by including voters who otherwise would have chosen Wallace. The favorable amount of media coverage given to Wallace may have made him successful not so much in the electoral sense, but in the sense that he may have achieved policy changes

through Halvorson that he might not have been able to achieve as a minor-party candidate (or a minor-party legislator).

Rammell vs. Marmon vs. Risch vs. LaRocco: Idaho Senate

Of the eight races selected for analysis, two were for U.S. Senate: the Minnesota race between Barkley, Franken, and Coleman, and the Idaho race. The Idaho Senate race is worth a closer look for several reasons. First, it was an important race because it would fill the seat left vacant by the resignation of Larry Craig, who had won reelection in 2002 with more than 65% of the vote. Second, candidate Rammell cannot accurately be called a "third"-party candidate in this race, because there were a total of five candidates running for Craig's Senate seat. Third, this race is notable for the amount of coverage given to Rammell (neither of the other two minor-party candidates passed the 5% threshold, though they too received a level of coverage that other minor-party candidates would envy). Of 458 articles found for this race, 196 mentioned Republican candidate and then-lieutenant governor Risch; 139 mentioned Democratic candidate LaRocco; 85 mentioned Rammell; and 38 mentioned another minor party candidate, Marmon (who received 1.54% of the vote). Risch won the election with 57.65% of the vote; Rammell received 5.35%, making him, like Wallace, a candidate whose media coverage was disproportionately large compared to his vote share. The coverage examined for this study comes from three local newspapers: the Spokane, Washington *Spokesman Review*; the Idaho *Lewiston Morning Tribune*; and the *Idaho Falls Register Post*.

To set the stage for this race (by far the most entertaining to read about): the major-

party candidates were Republican Risch and Democrat LaRocco. The minor-party

candidates were Rammell, running as an independent; Marmon, running as a Libertarian;

and a man who had his name legally changed to Pro-Life, also running as an

independent.[4] The media coverage of this race did uphold some elements of the protest

paradigm: there are a number of explicit references to Rammell (and the other minor-

party candidates) as spoilers, and occasional references to the minor-party candidates as

long shots, but as a whole the coverage of Idaho's Senate race serves as an example of

what good campaign coverage looks like. It is inclusive, informative, and dramatic.

Unlike other campaign articles, the coverage of the Idaho Senate race repeatedly

referred to the five candidates as a group, rather than two candidates and an "also

running…" candidate. All five candidates participated in the debates, and all were quoted

in the debate coverage. Each candidate's background, reasons for running, and platform

were often included. When a spoiler role was assigned, particularly to Rammell, it often

came from Republican (and leader in the pre-election polling) Risch rather than from an

outside organization or individual, which gave Rammell a sense of legitimacy because

his major-party opponent openly referred to him as a threat.

The relationship between Rammell and Risch is worthy of a reality television

program. During the time that Risch was governor of Idaho, Rammell owned an elk

ranch. In 2006, about one hundred elk escaped from Rammell's ranch. In an effort to

protect the state's wild elk herd from possible exposure to disease, Risch ordered the elk

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[4] Pro-Life's only stated goal was to spread his anti-abortion message to voters; he knew he had no chance
of winning but wanted to put a pro-life message on the ballot.

destroyed; about 40 elk were shot by state employees. Rammell sued Risch in civil court just before the primaries began, and, according to Rammell, the incident is what inspired him to run against Risch. After Rammell filed his petition to get on the ballot as an independent, the Idaho Republican Party hired a private investigator to determine whether Rammell's petition signatures were legitimate; they also argued that Rammell should not be able to run as an independent because he was a Republican at the time. Rammell was, in fact, a "strategic" third-party candidate in that he chose to run as an independent to avoid being defeated by Risch in the Republican primary. Although major-party officeholders were rejected from the eight-race analysis, excluding strategic third-party candidates like Rammell would have left little to work with. However, rarely were third-party candidates called out on their maneuvers as publicly as Rammell was.

The Rammell coverage also featured conflicts over who could legitimately solicit Mormon votes – Idaho has a large Mormon population, and Rammell was the only Mormon candidate. In addition, at one point the coverage focused on which candidates had served in Vietnam (Risch claimed he could not serve because he had an ulcer at the time). The *Lewiston Morning Tribune* did not miss an opportunity to mention that the Idaho Senate seat was vacant because of Larry Craig's arrest in a Minneapolis airport men's room gay sex sting, which led to Craig's resignation. The coverage features phrasing such as "tag-teaming body slams" (Spence, 2008) and "wherever Risch was Monday night, his ears must have been burning because his name came up several times" (Taule, 2008).

Overall, although there were some explicit references to Rammell's possible spoiler role, the coverage in Idaho was positive and informative for all three minor-party candidates. Newspaper readers were able to get an idea of each candidate's personality, motivation, and policy agenda. Every candidate was treated as legitimate, not necessarily as a contender for Craig's seat, but as a candidate whose point of view deserved to be heard. There was very little protest paradigm coverage in this race – but it is included here because it shows that high-stakes races featuring more than two candidates can still be informative (as well as entertaining).

Summary

The hypothesis that third-party candidates receive coverage that aligns with the protest paradigm is only partly supported. The low number of candidates with enough articles to code and the lower average of paragraph-level mentions overall indicates that there is marginalization occurring in media coverage of third-party candidates, most prominently in whether the third-party candidate receives any coverage at all. The other elements of protest paradigm coverage, delegitimization and demonization, do not appear to be present in the coverage analyzed for this study. The two examples of positive coverage indicate that the biggest hurdle faced by third-party candidates is getting any coverage at all; once coverage of a third-party candidate begins, it tends to be at least neutral and in some cases quite positive. This leaves us with several intriguing but unanswered questions. Why are some third-party candidates able to get coverage while others cannot? What factors lead to legitimization such as that conferred upon Wallace

and Rammell? Why do some third-party candidates receive more substantive coverage than others?

Chapter 5: Discussion

We now return to the research question that inspired this study. Does media coverage of third-party congressional candidates follow the protest paradigm? The answer is that it does to some extent, but not completely. The results of this analysis suggest that the only element of protest paradigm coverage that clearly overlaps between protest groups and third-party candidates is marginalization. This finding adds to the existing literature on third-party presidential (Pirch, 2006; Allen & Brox, 2005; Gold, 1995; Zaller & Hunt, 1995; Zaller & Hunt, 1994) and gubernatorial (Kirch, 2008) candidates to confirm that third-party candidates for Congress face similar problems when it comes to media exposure. However, the "straight" (i.e., non-editorial and non-investigative) journalism analyzed in this study does not contain notable amounts of delegitimization or demonization as outlined by McLeod and Hertog (1999). What is perhaps most notable about the findings is that the biggest obstacle faced by third-party candidates is access to media coverage. Once coverage happens, the third-party candidate tends to receive neutral-to-favorable coverage.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that future research will address. Most important, it became clear during the coding process that third-party candidates are not all alike and cannot easily be categorized as a single entity. It is possible that the coding guidelines used in this study were too rigid an instrument for assessing differences in coverage between third-party and major-party candidates. Future research should

examine the specific characteristics and environments of third-party candidates that may

lead to differences in coverage. For example, the three Minnesota races represent almost

half of the third-party coverage analyzed for this study; this is not surprising for a state

that elected a third-party governor in 1998. Putting each race into context may help

explain differences in coverage, not just between third-party candidates and their major-

party challengers, but also between or among third-party candidates in different elections.

Chapter 6: Directions for Future Research

This analysis examined whether there is a connection between media coverage of third-party candidates and McLeod and Hertog's (1999) protest paradigm. In spite of the lack of strong evidence to support the hypothesis that third-party candidates receive protest paradigm coverage, there is much left to discover.

To reiterate, "success" for third-party candidates is often more about bringing forward issues than being elected (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). With this in mind, it may be worth examining whether Sulkin's (2005) issue uptake theory can be more fully applied here. We saw in the Wallace coverage that his major-party opponent took up his environmental issues during the campaign, but did she pursue those issues during her first term in office? As Sulkin would put it, do the issues raised during third-party candidates' campaigns turn up in the winning candidate's legislative agenda?

Another issue that may affect the coverage received by third-party candidates is the partisanship of the district, which would affect the competitiveness of the race and thus the allocation of coverage. Partisanship of the district is easily measured by examining the incumbent's margins of victory in current and previous elections.

It would also be useful to clarify the terminology used by third parties. The terms "independent" and "independence" are used interchangeably. Whether an "independent" candidate is perceived as independent of a party or a member of an Independent/ Independence Party may be a factor in what type of coverage she or he receives.

It may also be worth examining whether the extremity of the third-party candidate

affects the level and content of media coverage. Are some third-party candidates more mainstream than others? If so, it would be interesting to examine whether their coverage differs according to the protest paradigm.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Gitlin (1977) argues that the media, in seeking an audience that it can sell to advertisers, "generate and legitimize certain languages and exclude others, or define [other languages] as deviant and inferior" (p. 791). Because audience members have little or no personal experience of politics, its language can easily be manufactured and defined for them by the media (Gitlin, 1977). By defining politics, and by creating a vocabulary with which to speak of politics, the media orchestrate our understanding of the world as a means of "stabilizing the society as it is" (Gitlin, 1977, p. 791). This is confirmed by McLeod and Hertog's (1999) assertion that the media's coverage of protest groups is a mechanism through which the media maintain social stability and thus social control.

Minor political parties are not without blame, however. Kirch (2008) notes that third parties often fail because "they nominate candidates who are either unknown or blatantly unqualified" (p. 62). Minor parties, then, are not immune to McLeod and Hertog's (1999) observation that in order to get any media coverage at all, a protest group must do something that attracts media attention. In the case of third parties, this sometimes results in the nomination of unusual – and unqualified – candidates. However, it is important to understand differences in coverage of third-party candidates because this coverage determines who has a voice in our political process. If, as Kirch (2008) writes, we aspire to be a normative democratic society in which all ideas are given fair debate, we must understand how the media elevate some ideas while marginalizing or outright ignoring others.

This study demonstrates that once third-party candidates get a foot in the door, so to speak, and begin receiving media coverage, that coverage tends to be at least neutral and at most favorable toward the third-party candidate. If it is the case that some third-party congressional candidates are invisible to voters, however, it is not for lack of trying. Understanding what factors stand in the way of successful third-party candidates offers benefits not just to the candidates but to voters as well.

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Table 1: Coding Guidelines

unit of observation: U.S. newspapers | unit of analysis: articles
database: LexisNexis
time frame searched: January 1, 2008 - November 4, 2008
limit search to local newspapers
exclude editorials and press releases

1. [Democratic candidate] (record total number of articles found)
2. [Republican candidate] (record total number of articles found)
3. [third-party candidate] (record total number of articles found and *print relevant articles*)
4. candidate
5. article number

Marginalization measure (*proportion of coverage*) – measure is a proportion
6. total number of paragraphs in the article
7. number of paragraphs (including headline) in which third-party candidate (TPC) or party is mentioned or referred to
8. number of paragraphs (including headline) in which Democratic candidate or party is mentioned or referred to
9. number of paragraphs (including headline) in which Republican candidate or party is mentioned or referred to
10. number of paragraphs (including headline) in which other TPCs or parties are mentioned or referred to

Delegitimization measure (*content of coverage*) – measure is a number/proportion
11. references to TPC as protest or "no confidence" vote against *both* major parties (MPs) – a reference to the candidate getting votes without being a contender; votes for the TPC aren't "serious"
    example: "[The TPC] said he's hoping a good number of voters will see his candidacy as a place where they can park a vote against both major party nominees."
proportional measure of delegitimization
12. number of direct quotes by the TPC or candidate spokesperson
13. number of direct quotes by Democratic opponent or candidate spokesperson
14. number of direct quotes by Republican opponent or candidate spokesperson
15. number of paraphrased TPC comments
16. number of paraphrased Democratic candidate comments
17. number of paraphrased Republican candidate comments

Demonization measure (*tone of coverage*) – measure is a number/proportion
18. references to the TPC as a spoiler, Nader effect, or wasted vote; taking away votes from *one* MP candidate; highlighting non-mainstream policy views as dangerous or foolish
    example: "[The TPC] insists he's not running as a spoiler" and "[The TPC] is probably going to pull 4 or 5 percent of the vote…some of those votes will come from the political right…"

only for paragraphs that mention the TPC (recorded in item #7)
19. number of neutral paragraphs (information is factual, without commentary or judgmental language)
20. number of positive paragraphs: chance of winning, electoral achievement, policy views, engaged opponents, surprising poll numbers, appeal to MP voters
21. number of negative paragraphs: non-viable, nonconformist, damage to MP candidate's chances, negative effect on race, appeal to fringe, dismissal by MP candidates
22. number of mixed paragraphs: positive and negative tone in same paragraph

Table 2: Statistics for the 23 Qualifying Third-Party Candidate Races, Listed Alphabetically by District

	race	candidate	votes	percentage	articles	percentage	analyzed	
1	CA1	wolman grn	24,793	8.54%	2	2.60%	0	• TPC listed first
	CA1	**thompson d/i**	197,812	68.10%	74	96.10%		• winner in bold
	CA1	starkewolf r	67,853	23.36%	1	1.30%		• MP challenger listed third
	CA1	total	290,472		77			• (v) = vacant seat
2	CA26	brown lib	18,476	6.92%	10	4.31%	0	
	CA26	**dreier r/i**	140,615	52.64%	184	79.31%		
	CA26	warner d	108,039	40.44%	38	16.38%		
	CA26	total	267,130		232			
3	CA27	denton lib	14,171	6.66%	3	5.66%	0	
	CA27	**sherman d/i**	145,812	68.51%	47	88.68%		
	CA27	singh r	52,852	24.83%	3	5.66%		
	CA27	total	212,835		53			
4	CA47	lauten ai	6,274	5.08%	0	0.00%	0	American Independent
	CA47	**sanchez d/i**	85,878	69.49%	28	96.55%		
	CA47	avila r	31,432	25.43%	1	3.45%		
	CA47	total	123,584		29			
5	FL13	schneider np	20,289	5.51%	20	6.49%	0	
	FL13	**buchanan r/i**	204,382	55.54%	195	63.31%		
	FL13	jennings d	137,967	37.49%	93	30.19%		
	FL13	total	367,996		308			
6	FL14	saunders np	54,750	14.49%	41	50.62%	0	R, Florida Senate
	FL14	**mack r/i**	224,602	59.44%	38	46.91%		*not used because third-party*
	FL14	neeld d	93,590	24.77%	2	2.47%		*candidate was a current*
	FL14	total	377,891		81			*officeholder as a Republican*
7	FL19	graber npa	20,214	6.61%	22	8.03%	12	no party affiliation
	FL19	**wexler d/i**	202,465	66.16%	249	90.88%		
	FL19	lynch r	83,357	27.24%	3	1.09%		
	FL19	total	306,036		274			
8	IDS	rammell ind	34,510	5.35%	85	18.56%	65	R Larry Craig's seat
	IDS	marmon lib	9,958	1.54%	38	8.30%		
	IDS	**risch r**	371,744	57.65%	196	42.79%		
	IDS	larocco d	219,903	34.11%	139	30.35%		
	IDS	total (v)	644,780		458			
9	IL4	lopez grn	11,053	7.92%	1	2.56%	0	
	IL4	**gutierrez d/i**	112,529	80.60%	38	97.44%		
	IL4	cunningham r	16,024	11.48%	0	0.00%		
	IL4	total	139,606		39			

	race	candidate	votes	percentage	articles	percentage	analyzed	
10	IL11	wallace grn	22,635	7.12%	42	27.10%	18	R Jerry Weller's seat
	IL11	**halvorson d**	185,652	58.40%	93	60.00%		
	IL11	ozinga r	109,608	34.48%	20	12.90%		
	IL11	total (v)	317,895		155			
11	IN3	larsen l	14,877	5.26%	0	0.00%	0	
	IN3	**souder r/i**	155,693	55.04%	22	84.62%		
	IN3	montagno d	112,309	39.70%	4	15.38%		
	IN3	total	282,879		26			
12	LA6	jackson npa	36,198	11.59%	74	31.76%	0	D, Louisiana House
	LA6	**cassidy r**	150,332	48.12%	142	60.94%		*not used because third-party*
	LA6	cazayoux d/i	125,886	40.29%	17	7.30%		*candidate was a current*
	LA6	total	312,416		233			*officeholder as a Democrat*
13	MA4	allen i	19,848	6.29%	0	0.00%	0	
	MA4	**frank d/i**	203,032	64.30%	85	97.70%		
	MA4	sholley r	75,571	23.94%	2	2.30%		
	MA4	total	315,734		87			
14	MNS	barkley ip	437,505	15.15%	131	9.27%	54	Independence Party
	MNS	**franken d**	1,212,629	41.99%	502	35.53%		
	MNS	coleman r/i	1,212,317	41.98%	780	55.20%		
	MNS	total	2,887,646		1,413			
15	MN3	dillon ip	38,970	10.56%	55	22.27%	43	R Jim Ramstad's seat
	MN3	**paulsen r**	178,932	48.48%	99	40.08%		
	MN3	madia d	150,787	40.85%	93	37.65%		
	MN3	total (v)	369,104		247			
16	MN5	mcgaughey ind	22,318	6.92%	6	3.02%	0	
	MN5	**ellison d/i**	228,776	70.88%	170	85.43%		
	MN5	davis white r	71,020	22.00%	23	11.56%		
	MN5	total	322,747		199			
17	MN6	anderson ip	40,643	10.04%	30	6.67%	11	
	MN6	**bachmann r/i**	187,817	46.41%	291	64.67%		
	MN6	tinklenberg d	175,786	43.43%	129	28.67%		
	MN6	total	404,725		450			
18	NM3	miller ind	36,348	12.79%	39	24.53%	21	
	NM3	**lujan d/i**	161,292	56.74%	118	74.21%		
	NM3	east r	86,618	30.47%	2	1.26%		
	NM3	total	284,258		159			

	race	candidate	votes	percentage	articles	percentage	analyzed	
19	OH2	krikorian ind	58,710	17.70%	6	9.52%	2	
	OH2	**schmidt r/i**	148,671	44.83%	41	65.08%		
	OH2	wulsin d	124,213	37.46%	16	25.40%		
	OH2	total	331,624		63			

	race	candidate	votes	percentage	articles	percentage	analyzed	
20	OK3	michael ind	17,756	6.72%	4	4.76%	0	
	OK3	**lucas r/i**	184,306	69.72%	72	85.71%		
	OK3	robbins d	62,297	23.57%	8	9.52%		
	OK3	total	264,359		84			
21	ORS	brownlow con	92,565	5.24%	6	1.40%	0	
	ORS	**merkley d**	864,392	48.90%	193	44.99%		
	ORS	smith r/i	805,159	45.55%	230	53.61%		
	ORS	total	1,767,504		429			
22	RI1	capalbo ind	15,108	7.13%	5	3.01%	0	
	RI1	**kennedy d/i**	145,254	68.52%	147	88.55%		
	RI1	scott r	51,340	24.22%	14	8.43%		
	RI1	total	211,998		166			
23	UT3	noorlander con	17,408	6.11%	7	2.55%	0	
	UT3	**chaffetz r**	187,035	65.61%	210	76.64%		beat R/i in primary
	UT3	spencer d	80,626	28.28%	57	20.80%		
	UT3	total	285,069		274			
			5536			**226**		

Table 3: Statistics for the Eight Analyzed Third-Party Candidate Races, Listed Alphabetically by District

	race	candidate	votes	percentage	articles	percentage	analyzed	
1	FL19	graber npa	20,214	6.61%	22	8.03%	12	• TPC listed first
	FL19	**wexler d/i**	202,465	66.16%	249	90.88%		• winner in bold
	FL19	lynch r	83,357	27.24%	3	1.09%		• MP challenger listed third
	FL19	total	306,036		274			• (v) = vacant seat
2	IDS	rammell ind	34,510	5.35%	85	18.56%	65	R Larry Craig's seat
	IDS	marmon lib	9,958	1.54%	38	8.30%		
	IDS	**risch r**	371,744	57.65%	196	42.79%		
	IDS	larocco d	219,903	34.11%	139	30.35%		
	IDS	total (v)	644,780		458			
3	IL11	wallace grn	22,635	7.12%	42	27.10%	18	R Jerry Weller's seat
	IL11	**halvorson d**	185,652	58.40%	93	60.00%		
	IL11	ozinga r	109,608	34.48%	20	12.90%		
	IL11	total (v)	317,895		155			
4	MNS	barkley ip	437,505	15.15%	131	9.27%	54	
	MNS	**franken d**	1,212,629	41.99%	502	35.53%		
	MNS	coleman r/i	1,212,317	41.98%	780	55.20%		
	MNS	total	2,887,646		1,413			
5	MN3	dillon ip	38,970	10.56%	55	22.27%	43	R Jim Ramstad's seat
	MN3	**paulsen r**	178,932	48.48%	99	40.08%		
	MN3	madia d	150,787	40.85%	93	37.65%		
	MN3	total (v)	369,104		247			
6	MN6	anderson ip	40,643	10.04%	30	6.67%	11	
	MN6	**bachmann r/i**	187,817	46.41%	291	64.67%		
	MN6	tinklenberg d	175,786	43.43%	129	28.67%		
	MN6	total	404,725		450			
7	NM3	miller ind	36,348	12.79%	39	24.53%	21	
	NM3	**lujan d/i**	161,292	56.74%	118	74.21%		
	NM3	east r	86,618	30.47%	2	1.26%		
	NM3	total	284,258		159			
8	OH2	krikorian ind	58,710	17.70%	6	9.52%	2	
	OH2	**schmidt r/i**	148,671	44.83%	41	65.08%		
	OH2	wulsin d	124,213	37.46%	16	25.40%		
	OH2	total	331,624		63			
					3219		**226**	

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the Eight Candidates Analyzed

candidate	% of vote	% of articles	# of articles coded	# of paragraphs coded
Graber, FL 19	6.61	5.3	12	198
Rammell, ID S	5.35	28.8	65	929
Wallace, IL 11	7.12	8.0	18	343
Dillon, MN 3	10.50	19.0	43	438
Anderson, MN 6	10.04	4.9	11	205
Barkley, MN S	15.15	23.9	54	1077
Miller, NM 3	12.79	9.3	21	408
Krikorian, OH 2	17.70	0.9	2	61
Total			226	3659

Table 5: Coding Results

marginalization	paragraphs	minimum ¶ per article	maximum ¶ per article	mean ¶ per article	SD
TPC references*	3659	1	44	4.87	5.14
Dem references	3659	0	70	6.20	6.63
Rep references	3659	0	27	6.84	5.63

	paragraphs	minimum	maximum	mean	SD
delegitimization 1	3659	0	4	0.29	0.69

delegitimization 2	paragraphs	minimum	maximum	mean	SD
TPC direct quote	3659	0	11	0.98	1.62
TPC paraphrase	3659	0	10	1.08	1.64
Dem direct quote	3659	0	15	1.12	1.76
Dem paraphrase	3659	0	15	1.18	1.94
Rep direct quote	3659	0	7	1.22	1.62
Rep paraphrase	3659	0	11	1.19	1.80

	paragraphs	minimum	maximum	mean	SD
demonization 1	3659	0	6	0.17	0.59

demonization 2	paragraphs	minimum	maximum	mean	SD
TPC references	3659	1	44	4.87	5.14
neutral	3659	0	27	2.74	3.64
positive	3659	0	13	1.50	2.30
negative	3659	0	6	0.50	0.94
mixed	3659	0	3	0.93	0.37

*all measurements were conducted at the paragraph level.